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# General Assembly

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*Official Records*

**60**th plenary meeting
Monday, 22 November 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

*President:* Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Mbanefo (Nigeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 20** (*continued*)

**Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/619)**

**(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/154 and Add.1)**

**Draft resolution (A/54/L.17/Rev.1)**

**(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions**

**Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/129/Rev.1, A/54/130/Rev.1, A/54/153, A/54/278, A/54/294, A/54/295, A/54/296, A/54/350, A/54/421, A/54/462, A/54/534)**

**Draft resolution (A/54/L.29)**

**(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/449)**

**Draft resolution (A/54/L.22)**

**(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/217)**

**(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/134)**

**Mr. Ismoilov** (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of Tajikistan believes that the report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, contained in document A/54/154, provides a good analysis of the successes and problems of United Nations activities in this area. The report's emphasis on the timely and well-planned implementation of at least some elements of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities, even during conflict, is of particular significance to our country, in view of the fact that an early beginning of reconstruction and development

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activities in a post-conflict environment can help supplement and strengthen political stability and the implementation of peace agreements. The peace process in Tajikistan needs active support from the international community now more than ever both in the humanitarian field and in the long-term context of restoring and developing by the economy.

We fully agree with the appraisal and conclusions given in the Secretary-General's report entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and rehabilitation in Tajikistan", contained in document A/54/294.

In spite of progress in the peace process, in the enactment of economic reforms and in the security situation in our country, hundreds of thousands of Tajiks continue to require international humanitarian assistance in order to meet their basic needs. We are deeply grateful to our friends, including countries, international organizations and particularly specialized agencies of the United Nations, for lending assistance to the people of Tajikistan.

As is rightly pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, despite the significance of humanitarian operations to promote and ensure peace and stability, the donor response to the consolidated inter-agency appeals for Tajikistan in 1998 and 1999 was not as encouraging as it might have been; however, we note with satisfaction the increase in the response of the humanitarian community to the 1999 appeal.

Insufficient funding in response to humanitarian appeals is one of the major factors limiting United Nations capabilities in lending humanitarian assistance, and this problem, unfortunately, is inherent in many United Nations humanitarian operations. We agree with the Secretary-General's special concern over the lack of support for assistance programmes providing foodstuffs and medical supplies designed to save people's lives. The implementation of those programmes requires that we ensure immediate financing so as to avoid an aggravation of the already difficult social situation in Tajikistan. In this respect, we support the United Nations intention to hold an evaluation of humanitarian assistance in the year 2000, with a view to solving the problems of long-term development. As long as the economy is not able to support the entire population of Tajikistan, and as long as the peace process is not completed, humanitarian operations will remain an important factor for ensuring stability in Tajikistan, as emphasized in the Secretary-General's report.

We highly value the work done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We support the activities of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee; useful recommendations have been elaborated within its framework to improve United Nations humanitarian activities.

An important and useful discussion on various aspects of United Nations humanitarian assistance took place at the Economic and Social Council's summer session. The agreed conclusions of the humanitarian segment adopted by the Economic and Social Council are an important document, providing guidelines to institutions and bodies of the United Nations system acting within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for the further improvement and coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, in particular in such a complex and important issue as emergency assistance for restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development in times of natural disasters and in complex emergency situations. This, as is well known, especially applies to Tajikistan.

In recent years, we have witnessed an increase in the number of large-scale natural disasters, including hurricanes Mitch and Georges; earthquakes in Afghanistan, Colombia, Turkey, Greece and Taiwan; flooding in Bangladesh, India, China and Nepal; and forest fires in Brazil, Indonesia and Russia. There was a significant increase in both loss of human life and material loss for the year 1998 alone as a result of natural disasters: more than 50,000 people died, and the economic damage amounted to approximately $100 billion.

We highly value the United Nations system's activities in coordinating the reduction of natural disasters. In this connection, we believe it appropriate to make greater use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund's resources for activities pertaining to natural disasters and technological catastrophes. Tajikistan is in an area of a potential large-scale environmental disaster if the dam holding back Lake Sarez were to collapse. As a result, not only Tajikistan but also Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan would find themselves faced with irreparable catastrophe. We note with satisfaction that the leadership of the United Nations Secretariat, in particular the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, is showing due consideration for this problem and an interest in cooperation with Tajikistan in warding off this threat.

We highly value United Nations efforts in lending humanitarian assistance to all countries, without exception, because of needs that might arise as a result of complex emergency situations, natural disasters or technological catastrophes. We believe it important to continue United Nations activities to mobilize assistance and eliminate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. Although 13 years have already passed since the Chernobyl disaster, its consequences continue to be felt just as sorely, since, objectively, they are of a long-term nature. With the current difficult financial situation, we believe it important to seek non-traditional ways to carry out United Nations projects and programmes, in particular in lending emergency and rehabilitation assistance. In this context, we support the Argentine "White Helmets" initiative, which provides for the use of national volunteer corps in international operations to lend assistance in emergency situations.

We value the efforts of the international community in lending humanitarian assistance to the suffering people of Afghanistan, without any discrimination whatsoever. We believe, however, that such assistance must be linked to the readiness of the parties in Afghanistan to seek a political solution to the conflict, to ensure safe conditions for the activities of international organizations in Afghanistan and to take measures to combat illegal drug trafficking and terrorism.

At this session, the delegation of Tajikistan has once again submitted to the General Assembly a draft resolution on emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and rehabilitation in Tajikistan. We are deeply grateful to those countries that have become sponsors of the draft resolution, and we are counting on the support of all Member States in view of the significance for the international community of normalcy and rehabilitation in Tajikistan.

**Mr. Semakula Kiwanuka** (Uganda): We are meeting at a time when the need to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations for the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance has never been greater. The recent catastrophic earthquakes in Turkey, Greece and Taiwan, *inter alia*, have once again pointed to the immense need for emergency humanitarian assistance. In 1998 alone, natural disasters in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean caused economic losses which amounted to over $90 billion. A year before, in 1997, natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods caused by El Niño, forest fires, famines, and so forth, cost at least $30 billion. Indeed, the decade of the 1990s has witnessed a phenomenal increase in devastation, death and human suffering, which, according to the Secretary-General's report on the work of the Organization submitted this year, have been estimated at $479 billion.

But while these natural disasters and emergencies are on the increase, resources to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations for aid and relief are on the decline. The Uganda delegation is concerned not only by the increasing scale of natural disasters, but also by the increase in the insecurity of humanitarian personnel. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the recommendations made therein. We urge the Governments concerned, which, under international law, bear the prime responsibility to provide security for the humanitarian personnel who dedicate their lives to the good of the people and to protecting them.

The time has come to emphasize prevention because some disasters are preventable, among them conflicts which have led to incalculable loss of life and massive numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. States must address the root causes of these man-made disasters. We refer to the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, which is still a landmark document.

Uganda commends the assistance of the United Nations as well as that of Africa's development partners in addressing the root causes of conflicts in Africa — in Sierra Leone, in Guinea-Bissau and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo among others. But, at the same time, we cannot fail to express our deep concern that many of Africa's humanitarian disasters — in Angola, the Sudan and Somalia for example — no longer attract worldwide attention. The United Nations humanitarian agencies recently launched a worldwide appeal for more than $199 million to finance emergency assistance programmes in East Timor; but Africans feel totally forgotten despite the calamities of refugees and internally displaced persons. It is not only conflicts that have caused disaster but also environmental degradation, lack of rain, poor harvests, shortages of pasture and water. Environmental degradation has resulted in worsening situations leading to massive desert encroachment in Africa, the continent most affected by desertification. This month, 159 member countries of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification are meeting in Recife, Brazil, to address this very problem, which affects 110 countries and the livelihoods of 250 million

people, and also puts a billion people at risk. The United Nations Environment Programme has estimated that desertification costs the world $42 billion a year in lost productivity, of which $9 billion involves Africa. Uganda is convinced that desertification and other disasters resulting from environmental degradation can be halted through concerted international assistance to those countries that are severely affected.

To strengthen United Nations efforts in the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, resources must be forthcoming. Uganda joins others in calling upon all organizations in the United Nations system, as well as other relevant international organizations, non-governmental organizations and Governments, to give support to the Secretary-General and to cooperate with him to cope with these emergencies.

**Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation attaches particular importance to the crucial problem of humanitarian assistance, now under discussion in the Assembly and to the role played by organizations and specialized agencies in this context.

We are convinced that the world Organization is the primary body responsible not only for the maintenance of international peace and security, but also for humanitarian assistance and for economic and social development, as set out in the Charter. For this reason, we would like to share with the Assembly some of our thoughts on humanitarian assistance.

My delegation has considered the report of the Secretary-General, contained in document A/54/154, on the coordination of humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations in emergencies, and document A/54/295 on emergency assistance provided by the Organization and its partners to the Sudan. We thank the Secretary-General and the specialized agencies for the work invested in the preparation of these two reports.

The Sudan has faith in the ability of the international community to provide assistance and in the positive interaction between our country and the rest of the international community. This is why we supported Operation Lifeline in 1989 in order to meet the needs of our citizens, because we are convinced the international community can play an active role in cases of famine, war and displacement. Operation Lifeline plays a very important role in developing humanitarian policies, policies for the settlement of conflicts and policies for the reconstruction of the country. Operation Lifeline's fundamental merit lies in the fact that it has established solid, continuous and renewable cooperation between the Sudan on the one hand, and non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations, on the other.

The Sudan is anxious to ensure delivery of humanitarian assistance without hindrance so that aid can reach its target, that is, its recipients. Therefore, we cooperate fully with the organizations responsible for monitoring respect for human rights, settlement of disputes, crisis management, prevention of natural disasters, early warning systems and mine clearance.

The Sudan strives to provide for the freedom of movement of humanitarian agencies, particularly in the areas under rebel control. We also cooperate in the investigations and research required to gauge the needs of the population. Some regular visits to the southern parts of Sudan have been made by the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, the Red Cross and by other non-governmental organizations with a view to determining those needs.

The Sudan is anxious to respect its commitments because of its religious duty and its noble traditions. I should like to make the following points: first, the number of aircraft devoted to the delivery of humanitarian assistance has risen from 4 to 20. Secondly, a unit responsible for coordinating the activities of all humanitarian agencies has been established. Thirdly, my Government has announced more than once that it is ready to comply with the ceasefire, and we now call on the international community to assist in exerting pressure on the rebel movement in order to establish a full and comprehensive ceasefire. Fourthly, despite enormous economic difficulties, the Government has refitted two airport facilities for the provision of humanitarian assistance. Fifthly, we also signed a security protocol with the rebel movement in Rome in November 1998, and also in Oslo in May 1999, with a view to opening land routes and providing unhindered delivery.

Operation Lifeline Sudan, to which we have referred, has various gaps and shortcomings that require common efforts on our part.

The tendency of western donor States to reserve the bulk of their assistance for areas close to their own regions and geographical boundaries has had a serious impact on Africa's prosperity. Crises in Africa have

indeed multiplied, and there is a large and increasing number of humanitarian emergencies on the continent.

Another negative phenomenon is earmarking assistance for certain purposes without taking into account the emergency priorities established by agencies in the context of Operation Lifeline. Some non-governmental organizations outside this framework receive more substantial assistance from the United Nations than those agencies involved in Operation Lifeline itself.

The principles of Operation Lifeline Sudan highlight the need for strengthening Sudanese national institutions and involving them in all areas of activity. In this connection, foreign organizations must be registered in order that they may be brought under the umbrella of Sudanese law and culture. Operation Lifeline Sudan has been operating for over 10 years, and it is plain that much has not been implemented.

We would like to see a review of the operations of the programme. A bilateral working group operating under the mandate of the United Nations does exist. This group has noted that it is wrong to bring in assistance from outside the country by air alone and that it would be more effective and efficient to use land, water or railway transportation to deliver emergency humanitarian supplies.

The Sudanese Government calls for well-coordinated cooperation with the United Nations so as to implement the consolidated appeal.

Paragraph 94 of the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/54/295 attributes the continuing disaster to a partial ban on flights in a certain area. In fact, it was the activities of rebels in that area that were responsible for the plundering of humanitarian supplies and the killing of personnel that gave rise to the problem. We call on everyone involved not to permit such activities to continue. There must be comprehensive cooperation in the humanitarian sphere.

We note that as the international community is making sure to protect humanitarian workers, four Sudanese citizens working for the Red Cross were killed by the rebels in March 1999. The rebel movement continues to refuse to hand over the remains of the murdered, despite repeated pleas from the international community. The rebel group took prisoner 13 humanitarian staff members of an international charity organization working for the development of Sudan's sub-Saharan region. Unfortunately, the United Nations and the international community have made no effort to obtain the release of these detained persons. The Sudanese Government would like to appeal from this rostrum to the international community to condemn the rebel group and the acts of detention and murder that they have committed, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

Paragraph 25 of the Secretary-General's report refers to the distribution of foodstuffs in the northern and southern sectors. As we see it, the southern sector receives more aid than the northern sector. In paragraphs 8 and 42 the Secretary-General says that about 45 to 50 per cent of humanitarian assistance does not reach its intended targets in the rebel-controlled areas in the south due to the taxes imposed on relief materials. We feel that there is a need to control the situation more efficiently in the context of Operation Lifeline Sudan. We would like to see the international community condemn these practices that impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We cannot but reaffirm what the Secretary-General has said about the cooperation of the Sudanese Government. We are striving to carry out the necessary surveys to identify the needs of the population. Those surveys are being carried out by a specialized inter-agency committee. In response to an appeal by the Secretary-General, in May 1999 the Sudanese Government allowed reconnaissance surveys to be carried out in mountainous areas of the country. A working group prepared a report that addressed accusations of famine and ethnic cleansing among the families living in that area. Those allegations were proven wrong.

We appeal to the international community to contribute to a health and education programme that will make it possible to eliminate poverty to a large extent. We ask that contributors be as generous as possible.

In conclusion, I wish to say that the cooperation between our Government and the international community illustrates how much we desire to resolve the problems of natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. However, forced intervention is something that contravenes the spirit of humanitarian assistance. That assistance should always be provided in the context of respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of a State and according to the terms of the United Nations Charter.

Finally, I would once again like to extend my thanks to this international Organization. We hope that its

activities will make it possible for us to overcome our crises by eliminating their causes and through peaceful means.

**Mr. Shami** (Pakistan): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports presented under item 20. We associate ourselves with the statement made on this agenda item by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance is one of the critical functions carried out by the United Nations. Over the last decade, United Nations activities in this field have increased manyfold. Yet the United Nations lags far behind in meeting the ever-increasing demand for effective relief operations. To meet these challenges, the United Nations system, particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has been making efforts to improve its ability to respond effectively to humanitarian crises. We appreciate these endeavours.

It is, however, generally believed that any effective response to a humanitarian crisis, be it of large or small proportions, requires the following key ingredients: first, timeliness; secondly, effective central coordination; thirdly, adequate funding; and, last but not least, the ability to address the root causes of the crisis.

The entire debate that culminated in the adoption of resolution 46/182 revolved around the critical importance of coordination of the activities of the United Nations system in an emergency situation in order to respond in a timely manner to the immediate needs of the affected people. While over the past eight years the United Nations has attempted to develop its capabilities to respond to emergencies effectively, in many situations its response came too late. For the victims of humanitarian disasters, relief delayed is relief denied. The United Nations system should undertake measures to reduce its response time. We support the Secretary-General's call for an increased focus on early warning and preparedness measures. Adequate resources should be made available to support the United Nations initiatives to improve its early warning mechanisms.

Coordination holds the key to the effectiveness of a timely response. However, the multitude of actors, the overlapping mandates and competing demands for limited resources exacerbate the difficulties faced by the United Nations system in the field of coordination. We believe that the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council has provided us with an effective intergovernmental forum to address these questions. The Council can and should provide guidelines on the coordination of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian assistance, no matter how well coordinated, is of little consequence if not backed by commensurate resources to mitigate the severe impacts of disasters. The lack of funding is a major constraint on United Nations humanitarian response. We note with concern that the United Nations difficulties in responding to humanitarian situations have been compounded by uneven levels of funding to the consolidated appeals. The selective responses were largely determined by geographical, political and sectoral considerations.

Pakistan strongly emphasizes that the basic principle of humanitarian action is that relief is provided irrespective of political and other considerations. We must make every effort to ensure that this principle is not undermined. Response to international appeals must be commensurate with needs and not determined by the quantum of media coverage and political considerations. The human dimension must be the determining factor in providing assistance.

In our increasingly interdependent world, we cannot ignore the sufferings of humanity in any part of the world. In 1998 alone over 50,000 people worldwide died as a result of natural calamities; for 1999 that number is even higher. Millions more were left homeless, and estimated economic losses reached $90 billion. Dealing with this scale of devastation in a timely and effective manner is a formidable challenge for the international community. It is obvious from the magnitude of the problem that the United Nations limited capacity in this area needs to be developed further.

We are also pleased to learn that international aid agencies increasingly recognize the need for a comprehensive approach to humanitarian crises. My delegation has long held the view that a successful relief programme is one that paves the way for development. Financing has a crucial role to play in this regard. We support the Secretary-General's recommendation that funds for reconstruction should be made available sooner and through less onerous procedures. The relief-to-development continuum must run smoothly and without unnecessary disruption.

The Secretary-General, in an addendum to his report, has drawn attention to the attacks on humanitarian

personnel. United Nations staff members are vulnerable in all emergency situations, whether these are man-made or the result of natural disasters. Some have even lost their lives. We believe the safety and security of United Nations humanitarian personnel is an extremely important issue. In the past, our own countrymen serving under United Nations auspices have been attacked and killed. We commend United Nations humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel, wherever they serve. It is essential that these humanitarian personnel be allowed to discharge their duties effectively and safely.

Never before in the history of mankind have we had this level of resources and sophisticated technologies to deal with humanitarian disasters. It would be unfortunate if the international community failed to undertake concerted action to respond to all humanitarian emergencies.

To conclude, we believe that while strands of commonality exist, every humanitarian emergency is unique. The United Nations strength must lie in its ability to effectively react to each crisis in a flexible and timely manner.

**Mr. Jacob** (Israel): Those who view the peace process in terms of one-dimensional political negotiations are mistaken. Israeli Governments, since the launch of the peace process, have attached special importance to the economic dimension of peacemaking in general and to the economic aspects of the Palestinian track of the peace process in particular.

The Government of Israel views the improvement of the Palestinian economic situation as a strategic objective, and it views the international community as a central means to accomplish this aim. Israel, for its part, has openly demonstrated its readiness to make the necessary sacrifices in order to advance economic relations with the Palestinian Authority and the well-being of the Palestinian people.

Over the past five years, significant improvement has taken place in the Palestinian economy. The positive trend in employment and private-sector activity was detailed in the latest report submitted by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the territories in September of this year. Among other trends, the report notes that in 1998 the Palestinian gross national product grew by 8 per cent. This was accompanied by a decrease this year of 13 per cent in the Palestinian unemployment rate. The United Nations Special Coordinator's report also highlights the growth of real wages by 2.5 per cent, the growth of credit extended to Palestinian businesses by 16 per cent, and a rise in the registration of new companies by a whopping 35 per cent.

We have come to the definite conclusion that those periods in which there was a calm security situation also saw growth in the Palestinian economy. A consistent and determined effort by the Palestinian Authority to fight terrorism and its infrastructure makes it easier for Israel and other parties to continue in their efforts to improve the Palestinian economic situation. A most striking example of this is the significant drop in security closures of the West Bank and Gaza, which had usually been employed in the wake of terrorist attacks or threats of imminent attack. While there were 92 closure days in 1996 and 63 in 1997, there were only about 25 in 1998 and only five so far in 1999 — and most of those were simply due to holidays, when most places of employment in Israel are closed.

Yet beyond its effort to reduce security closures to an absolute minimum, Israel has undertaken a number of proactive initiatives in order to strengthen the Palestinian economy.

First, the Government of Israel has continued its policy of easing access for Palestinian workers to the Israeli labour market. In 1997 the number of Palestinians working in Israel stood at 47,000, and in 1998 it grew to 60,000. Today, around 70,000 Palestinians commute daily to regular jobs within Israel, while an estimated additional 50,000 to 60,000 work in Israel without having the requisite work permit. This growth has led to a significant drop in unemployment in the Palestinian Authority areas and to a rise in productivity. Today, income from employment within Israel constitutes a very significant share of the overall income of the Palestinian labour force, amounting to 43 per cent for the West Bank and 33 per cent for Gaza. The growth in the number of Palestinians working in Israel may be attributed to a number of steps taken by Israel, some with the cooperation of the Palestinian Authority. These steps include the elimination of quotas for Palestinian employees entering Israel, the lowering of the minimum age limit for such employees to 21, an overnight stay programme reducing the need to commute, a continuous employment programme allowing most workers access to jobs even during the now rare closures, labour exchanges to promote employment, and flexible hours to allow for working in shifts. These and other steps are detailed in a full version of this statement, which will be made available to delegations.

Secondly, we are working to strengthen the Palestinian private sector, in recognition of that sector's central role in the future growth of the Palestinian economy as a whole. In this regard, Israel is encouraging investment in Palestinian enterprises and is making a determined effort to resolve the problem concerning the movement of people and goods, among other things, by easing the movement of Palestinian businesspersons between Israel and the Palestinian Authority areas. Commercial vehicle traffic has also been significantly expanded.

Thirdly, Israel has transferred to the Palestinian Authority, to date, tax revenues amounting to $2 billion, in accordance with the Paris economic annex to the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This sum represents about 60 per cent of the Palestinian Authority budget.

Fourthly, Israel allocated $75 million between 1993 and 1998 as assistance to the Palestinian Authority and for joint projects. In addition, Israel made a commitment at the donors conference in Washington to allocate a further $15 million in assistance to the Palestinians.

Fifthly, an issue of considerable importance in our economic relations with the Palestinian Authority is the industrial parks project. The first such park, the Gaza Industrial Estate, was inaugurated in March 1999, and today about 1,000 workers are employed there. When the project is fully operational, it is expected to provide up to 50,000 jobs. Plans have been laid for an additional industrial park in the Jenin region, to be established with the assistance of the German Government. The Government of Israel is very interested in promoting Israeli investment in these industrial parks, and to that end it has extended $50 million in risk insurance to investors. Israel is also providing infrastructure hook-up for the Gaza Industrial Estate and a state-of-the-art cargo terminal to be operated by the Israel Ports Authority.

Sixthly, in a few weeks' time, we will all be marking the beginning of the year 2000, and there are few places more suitable to observe this historic occasion than in Nazareth, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. We are gratified that we can together welcome this new millennium now, after we have travelled so far towards bringing peace to the Holy Land. As we mentioned last week in the Assembly's discussion of the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority expect to host millions of tourists and pilgrims in our area in the coming months. Israel has already made intensive preparations and has invested immense resources in preparing for the celebrations, but it must be remembered that this is an enormous project, and only cooperation between Israel and our Palestinian neighbours will ensure its success.

And finally, the great importance attached by Israel to the movement of goods and individuals is expressed also in two central projects referred to in the recently concluded Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum: the safe passage and the Gaza port. The safe passage, inaugurated last month, will over time enable the free flow of goods, labour and capital between the West Bank and Gaza. As of last week, about 10,500 round-trip passes had been issued by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and the passage has been well utilized. The Gaza port will reinforce a sense of economic independence for the Palestinians, while the construction work on the port provides local employment for scores of Palestinian labourers and professionals. Those two projects, together with the Gaza International Airport which was inaugurated after the signing of the Wye River Memorandum, will most certainly promote the continued strengthening of the Palestinian economy.

Allow me to turn now to the subject of Israeli-Palestinian development cooperation. Over the past 41 years, Israel, through the Centre for International Cooperation of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MASHAV), has been assisting developing countries throughout the world. This clearly reflects both our national experience and our humanitarian values. Within that framework, however, it is only natural that we should place emphasis on promoting Israeli cooperation with our Palestinian neighbours.

The underlying principle guiding Israel's technical development cooperation programme with the Palestinians stems from the belief that peace will be secured only when it takes root in the everyday lives of the peoples in the region. The ongoing development dialogue established between Israel and Palestinian professionals and the positive results achieved at the grass-roots level attest to the willingness of both peoples to strive together, in dignity, towards the common goal of peaceful cooperation, through programmes dealing with economic growth, health care, community services, overcoming gender-based constraints, food security, water management and good governance.

Advancing human-enrichment and capacity-building programmes in collaboration with the Palestinian Authority has therefore been given highest priority on Israel's development agenda. Regarding human-

enrichment programmes, in 1998, fellowships were awarded to 820 Palestinian professionals, enabling their participation in various professional training courses held both in Israel and in the areas administered by the Palestinian Authority. For the past three years, Palestinian professionals have constituted the largest contingent of participants in MASHAV courses in Israel.

In the realm of agricultural cooperation, the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture and MASHAV collaborated for the first time to produce a one-year professional agriculture development training programme, which is being implemented in Israel and the Palestinian Authority areas this year. The programme, designed to meet needs presented by the Palestinians themselves, includes the participation of Palestinian and Israeli lecturers and experts. Six of the programme's eight courses have already been carried out.

The establishment of on-site project-demonstration farms, accompanied by long- and short-term consultancies, is also a significant element in fostering economic growth. Israel and the Palestinian Authority have agreed to cooperate on the implementation of the various projects geared to promote higher-quality yields for domestic and export markets.

The main objectives of any successful sustainable development programme include institutional capacity-building and support for indigenous non-governmental organizations. Two examples of such programming in Israeli-Palestinian development cooperation are a joint substance abuse project and support for Palestinian health-care non-governmental organizations. During 1998, MASHAV initiated a cooperative project on substance abuse and sponsored two professional training courses at Beersheba and Al-Quds Universities, while allocating funds towards the purchase of necessary equipment and materials needed to facilitate the operation of the first Palestinian drug abuse resource centre in Gaza.

Also, for the past several years, MASHAV has been working with an Israeli non-governmental organization, the Economic Cooperation Foundation, and Palestinian non-governmental organizations on a wide range of people-to-people health-related programmes.

In the field of trauma care, together with the Palestinian Council of Health, an non-governmental organization, and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, training programmes were implemented at Jerusalem's Hadassah hospital for the first cadres of Palestinian trauma experts. These courses have led to improved formal and informal contacts between the Palestinian Red Crescent Society's emergency care workers, emergency room workers in the West Bank and Gaza and the trauma unit staff of Hadassah hospital.

In the realm of primary health care, the "North to North" programme provides professional training programmes for rural Palestinian Red Crescent Society health care workers from clinics in the northern West Bank, internships for the clinic staff at Israeli-based "Mother and Child" centres in the northern Israeli cities of Nazareth and Acre and management training over a three-year period. Today, the project is in its final stage, the training of clinic directors.

In the field of rehabilitation, professional training programmes were developed in 1998 to bring together Israeli and Palestinian rehabilitation institutes. The participants included Israel's Sheba Medical Centre in Ramat Gan, the Arab Rehabilitation Society in Beit Jalla, the Society for Physically Handicapped People of Gaza and the El Wafa Rehabilitation Centre.

Another crucial component in development programming is the coordination among donor countries operating in the area. In addition to programmes sponsored in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development, MASHAV has been working together for the last 25 years with the Government of the Netherlands on human capacity-building programmes. Israel is constantly searching for partnerships in trilateral and multilateral programme implementation for the benefit of all peoples in the region.

Examples of such programmes include a professional training course at Hadassah Medical Centre for Ramallah hospital staff members, with the cooperation of the United Kingdom; a programme for cooperation in the field of epidemiology, with the cooperation of Belgium; a three-year regional agricultural programme promoting professional agricultural training programmes, with the cooperation of Denmark; a regional symposium held in Israel in March 1999 on management of soil and water resources in arid and semi-arid areas, with the cooperation of Sweden; a two-year training programme for employees of the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Labour on the subject of safety and hygiene in the workplace, also with Swedish cooperation; and about a dozen joint academic research projects

incorporating Israeli and Palestinian universities as part of the ongoing cooperation with the Netherlands.

The Government of Israel welcomes such regional programming, which embodies full partnership, equality among all participants and the exchange of ideas and information. Israel recognizes the important role played by the United Nations Development Programme's programme for assistance to the Palestinian people, which has included the coordination of the investment of over $300 million in the Palestinian economy and Palestinian society over the past two decades. This investment has helped build not only the backbone of capital assistance — infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, piped water, sewage treatment and electrification — but also the sinew of individual and institutional development — the technical and administrative capacity needed to manage human and natural resources.

The burgeoning Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the agreements signed between the two parties have brought with them a rapid expansion of development activities as donor support for the newly established Palestinian Authority has come to be seen as an investment in the success of peace.

Opportunities for joint Palestinian-Israeli development cooperation in the Middle East region are endless, and there is no limit to what we might achieve in the twenty-first century. Since the beginning of MASHAV programming in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, it is truly remarkable how much we have learned from one another. Israelis and Palestinians have worked side by side to advance human development programming in such areas as micro-enterprises, primary health care, efficient use and management of water, reducing gender biases, environmental conservation, community-based leadership, food security and more.

However, opening new avenues for development cooperation and implementing the myriad priority programmes of the Palestinian agenda cannot be achieved without the assistance of all parties committed to the peace process. Israel looks forward to strengthening professional ties with the Palestinian people as a further expression of our sincere desire for and commitment to regional prosperity, stability, and a life based on human dignity for all.

**Mr. Stanislaus** (Grenada): My delegation begins by thanking, complimenting and praising the Secretary-General for his comprehensive, expressive and thought-provoking report.

The Assembly will, I hope, pardon me for speaking somewhat hurriedly, but sincerely, with respect to the natural disaster visited upon Carriacou and Petit Martinique in my country, the State of Grenada, along with Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Anguilla, Saint Martin, the Virgin Islands and others, by the unusually late arrival of hurricane Lenny, still drifting in the Caribbean like a sword of Damocles hanging over the Achilles heel of helpless small island developing States.

This hurricane is unusual not only for its lateness and ferocious winds, but also because it spreads its force selectively and has caused sea level rise and huge, mountainous waves that have completely destroyed the coastal area in my country and others, where the population is concentrated. Some roads are damaged and destroyed, making transportation impossible. Some homes and businesses have been washed away by the sea, while others have collapsed and been left beyond repair. The fishing fleet of small and medium-sized vessels upon which much of the economy is dependent has been damaged or destroyed. Much of the same kind of disaster has been visited upon the other islands. Thank God that few lives have been lost because of early warning systems now in use.

The phenomenon of global warming and the accompanying sea-level rise seem more and more to be a force in nature with which we must contend seriously in the twenty-first century. This phenomenon is man-made and can be assuaged, unlike the natural disasters such as hurricanes, volcanoes, earthquakes, cyclones, typhoons and so forth. The world experiences enough of these natural disasters and does not need the man-made kind.

Nature in its benevolence dispenses wondrous blessings according to its inimitable laws, but those who challenge nature do so at their own risk, and this is at best perilous, and at worst, disastrous.

Let me conclude by expressing the hope that members of the international community, in the spirit of humanity expressed in agenda item 20, will find it appropriate and expedient to come to the assistance of small island developing States in their time of trial and tribulation, remembering that we must not allow our technology to out-distance our humanity.

**The President:** In accordance with the decision taken by the Assembly at the 58th plenary meeting, I now call on the Permanent Observer of Switzerland.

**Mr. Staehelin** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to congratulate the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs along with his whole team for the excellent job done in the course of the last year. Thanks to their commitment and dedication to the humanitarian cause, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has attained the level and quality of activity that my delegation has long hoped for.

My delegation also welcomes the holding of the second humanitarian segment at the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in July. We are convinced that this exercise should be continued in the interest of enhanced dialogue among the delegations. However, if the segment is to contribute effectively to humanitarian coordination and provide guidelines to humanitarian agencies, certain improvements still need to be contemplated.

In spite of all the efforts that have been made, it must be acknowledged that the topic of humanitarian coordination continues to be of concern, as was demonstrated in the recent crises in the Balkans and in East Timor, or in the humanitarian response to hurricane Mitch. The appropriateness, efficiency and speed with which humanitarian aid is delivered to the victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts are topics that continue to give rise to many questions.

In order to cope successfully with the problems posed by humanitarian coordination, it is important to distinguish the responsibility of States and parties to conflicts, on the one hand, from the responsibility of humanitarian actors on the other. Allow me to offer a few thoughts on each of these aspects.

As regards natural disasters, States need to devise strategies for ensuring lasting economic and social development. At the same time, they need to incorporate disaster prevention and the quest for solutions to disasters in their overall development plans and in the international warning systems. States — and also humanitarian actors — could also enhance the effectiveness of emergency relief by establishing targeted training programmes for humanitarian actors responding not only to natural disasters but also to complex emergency situations. States should also establish flexible mechanisms for the financing of humanitarian activities.

As regards armed conflict, it must unfortunately be acknowledged that the rules of international humanitarian law and those of international human rights law are often flouted. In order to create a safe environment for humanitarian action, the rules of international humanitarian law must be strictly adhered to. In this regard, we should recall the primary responsibility of States and of all parties to conflicts. In effect States should undertake additional measures, such as stepping up efforts to eliminate anti-personnel mines, combating the excessive stockpiling and illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, addressing the fate of children involved in armed conflicts, protecting and assisting internally displaced people and ensuring the rapid entry into force of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Switzerland would also appeal once again to the parties in non-international armed conflicts to comply fully and scrupulously with the pertinent rules of international humanitarian law, in particular those embodied in common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and the provisions of Protocol II. Likewise Switzerland appeals once again to parties to conflicts to provide for the safety and dignity of people fleeing combat zones and to create the necessary conditions so that humanitarian organizations can provide assistance and protection to the civilian population.

Switzerland knows that it is not alone in advocating the dissemination of a culture of peace, reconciliation and understanding among individuals and among peoples. Moreover, it would be inconceivable to act in isolation. Active support must be given by States and by parties to conflicts and — in accordance with their respective mandates — by United Nations humanitarian actors, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent and non-governmental organizations.

This leads me to my second point, which has to do with the role of humanitarian actors in humanitarian coordination. Switzerland takes the view that humanitarian crises, whatever their nature, can be effectively resolved only through multifaceted involvement covering all aspects of the crisis. In other words, it is essential to plan coordination and consultation with all the actors — humanitarian and others, United Nations actors and non-United Nations actors.

During the crisis phase, humanitarian actors should already be preparing and planning for the transition, by defining by common agreement a strategic framework

with development actors. At a time of increasing globalization, the economic and financial institutions also must play their role and shoulder their responsibility. In this regard, it is urgent that these institutions become aware of their obligations and act accordingly.

Switzerland also takes the view that the United Nations has enough coordination mechanisms, both in the field and at Headquarters. We note, however, that still there is too often a waste of resources, duplication of effort and undesirable competition among the humanitarian organizations themselves. This competition is now unfortunately compounded by that of the development actors, themselves eager to become operational in the humanitarian area as well.

We feel that the potential gaps between the mandates of the various actors could be breached by the establishment of closer links between the existing coordination mechanisms. We therefore believe that what is needed above all is a change of culture. All the actors should truly cooperate and stop engaging in jurisdictional battles. The first lessons of the Kosovo crisis clearly show in this respect that it is essential to ensure that the mandates and roles of every actor present in the field be known and respected.

In this regard, Switzerland is convinced of the subsidiary nature of the presence of armed forces in the humanitarian and development space. In the crisis phase, it may be possible to consider a contribution from armed forces. This should be confined, however, to certain well-defined spheres, such as security, logistical support and telecommunications, for example. Armed forces should not replace the local labour force.

**The Acting President:** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

**Mr. Paclisanu** (International Committee of the Red Cross): In many conflicts, civilians are no longer considered to be extraneous to war or even used as a logistic or political support base. They have become stakes in conflicts or even the very reason for them. Because of their religious, cultural or ethnic affiliation, they have become a tool of warfare, a target of hostilities.

Granted, this tendency is not new. However, the trend has grown worse in contemporary conflicts, in particular those involving issues of identity. As a result, there has been an exponential increase in security risks incurred by humanitarian personnel. By virtue of their presence on the ground at the very heart of conflicts, they have come to be viewed as dangerous witnesses to the brutal methods of exclusion or elimination used by protagonists. The dozens of casualties mourned by humanitarian organizations in the last few years attest to this. The tragic irony, however, is that the international community has come to accept losses among humanitarian workers more easily than it does those suffered by the military.

Another impediment to the effectiveness of humanitarian action and efforts is the international community's apparent lack of consistency in managing crises. Unequal attention has been paid to dire humanitarian emergencies. Whereas developments in Kosovo and East Timor, for example, have assumed global dimensions, humanitarian agencies have been left alone to cope with long, drawn-out conflicts in such places as Central Africa, the Sudan, Angola or Afghanistan.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would like to recall what it has been so tireless in repeating: Political problems need political solutions. Humanitarian endeavours cannot substitute for these. They can, at the very best, serve as palliative means of containing politically unstable situations. Although humanitarian action takes place in contexts in which political, economic, social and military factors are inextricably connected, it is absolutely vital for humanitarian institutions to preserve the strictly non-political and impartial character of their mission. The provision of humanitarian assistance must not be linked to progress in political negotiations or to other political objectives. This would ultimately lead to an unacceptable distinction between so-called "good" and "bad" victims. Humanitarian aid and political action must not only be dissociated from one another — they must also be perceived as such.

This rather pessimistic general observation must not be cause for gloom. On the contrary, it is a reminder that, despite considerable difficulties, humanitarian organizations are able to provide protection and assistance to millions of people every day. It should also give us pause for thought on what can and must be done to improve the lot of civilians caught up in armed conflicts. For the ICRC, there is no doubt — absolutely no doubt — that human beings and respect for human dignity must be returned to the heart of political thinking and decision-making.

This real concern was at the core of debates at the twenty-seventh International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which convened in Geneva at the beginning of this month. It gathered representatives of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's components and of States parties to the Geneva Conventions. All shared their views and worked to coordinate their efforts to tackle emergencies. The Conference stressed the power of humanity in challenging inequalities, in preparing for and efficiently responding to emergencies and in searching for common solutions to the humanitarian consequences of conflicts and disasters.

A detailed Plan of Action for the coming four years was adopted. It outlines key goals and proposed actions for their implementation. The improvement of humanitarian response was deemed a priority. It is to be achieved through improved national and international preparedness; strengthened mechanisms of cooperation and coordination amongst States, the Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other humanitarian actors; improved priority-setting by focusing on the rights and needs of the most vulnerable people; and, last but certainly not least, a better understanding of the respective roles of political, military and humanitarian actors, as well as protection of humanitarian personnel.

Against this backdrop, the ICRC would like to stress its continued commitment to improved coordination between humanitarian agencies. It does recognizes the need to strengthen its cooperation with bodies such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. This policy is dictated by two key considerations.

The first is ICRC's desire to achieve the greatest possible complementarity between the efforts of the Movement and those of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations. The second, and certainly no less important, relates to ICRC's firm determination to fulfil its special role as an independent and neutral intermediary in situations of armed conflict, as enshrined in the Geneva Conventions.

Apart from this expanding cooperation with United Nations coordination mechanisms, the ICRC has also been pursuing a bilateral dialogue with United Nations specialized agencies and bodies, as well as with some of the major non-governmental organizations involved in emergency situations and humanitarian advocacy. This two-track approach is aimed at enhancing mutual understanding and strengthening sectoral coordination and cooperation.

Effective humanitarian response to crisis also depends upon the development of an open dialogue between all key players in humanitarian emergencies, both within and beyond the humanitarian community. This is essential to the relevance of humanitarian action, especially in today's volatile and rapidly changing conflict environments. The ICRC thus strives to expand its contacts with political and military organizations, as well as financial institutions such as the World Bank.

The ICRC is convinced that now more than ever, humanitarian agencies and political leaders should engage in a regular, comprehensive dialogue. It recognizes the need to be proactive in matters involving humanitarian diplomacy and is therefore paying increasing attention to its interaction with Governments and regional and global political bodies.

As part of this ongoing drive, last May the ICRC convened, for the third consecutive year, the Wolfsberg Humanitarian Forum. This gathering provides humanitarian leaders and senior Government officials in charge of humanitarian affairs with a unique opportunity to discuss and debate humanitarian issues in an informal setting. The last round of discussions emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to crisis management, taking into account the respective mandates — and I underline these last words, respective mandates — and roles of the various actors, political, military and humanitarian.

The challenges ahead lie in the international community's ability and will to reach comprehensive solutions to humanitarian problems. Such solutions can last only if they rest on political, economic and social measures which deal with the roots of conflicts. The ICRC, for its part, spares no effort in striving for efficient humanitarian coordination and for a clearly defined framework of interaction between humanitarian and political endeavours, one that preserves the essence of humanitarian action.

**The Acting President**: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call on the observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

**Mr. Linati-Bosch** (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): Today the most important activities of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta can be seen as being strongly related to respect for and development of human rights, if we consider the fight against poverty and

ignorance and the struggle in favour of the security of persons, equality before the law, freedom of movement, family rights and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. All these items justify the importance that the Sovereign Order attaches to human rights and to their implementation.

The Sovereign Order of Malta is conscious of its duties with respect to human rights and of the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of these rights, for, in accordance with its tradition, the Order states that they come directly from God. We also acknowledge that human rights, if violated, are a matter that concerns each State under the limits of its sovereignty, but we also recognized that, at the same time, the international community must be conscious of its responsibility.

In accordance with the spirit of the statement made at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, in 1993, the Order underlines the important task that all States must carry out to ensure the full and effective implementation of the principles of international humanitarian law in order to assure the safety and security of personnel working in relief assistance. The recent experience of the Order in East Timor highlights the urgent need in this regard.

The process of protecting human rights has an impact on development and, at the same time, helps prevent conflicts and promote their resolution and encompasses economic, social and cultural rights. If I may be allowed to speak in financial terms, we need to invest first in order to obtain benefits later. In this case, the beneficiary is mankind. This is a challenge that, without exaggeration, can be qualified as the most important aim of the international community.

We must recognize that we are still far from reaching our goal, as 1 billion people live today in absolute poverty, without having their basic needs fulfilled, a gap that we can also find in other areas such as education, tolerance and dialogue. As His Holiness John Paul II said in his message to the General Assembly on 11 December 1998,

> "these fundamental rights — proclaimed, codified and celebrated though they are — are still the object of continuous and serious violations." (*A/53/PV.90, p. 22*)

In fact, we continue to live in a divided world where more than 80 per cent of natural resources are controlled and consumed by only 20 per cent of humanity. Therefore, we cannot merely be proud of the achievements and advances of human rights, but must also focus our attention on the work that remains to be done. The Order is ready to take part in a process of international consciousness-raising devoted to cooperation and partnership. We are pleased to point out to the General Assembly that the Order of Malta has subscribed to United Nations principles by sending aid and helping in the reconstruction of El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua and other parts of the Caribbean area, helping with a global aid package of over $8 million, in addition to volunteer work. The bilateral agreement between the Order and the Republic of Cuba amounts to almost as much.

In Honduras, the Emergency Corps of the Order of Malta, has decided to undertake two separate relief projects. The first is in Choluteca, a town of 100,000 inhabitants and the capital of the Choluteca district, which has 450,000 inhabitants. Aid was sent to people living in temporary shelters and suffering from acute health problems caused by poor hygienic conditions. The second is in the village of Morolica, a local centre for an area comprising 6,000 inhabitants, which was supplied with mobile medical teams, household supplies and the equipment needed for a dispensary. In both cases, the Order is helping restore normal living conditions to the areas. The Order of Malta has worked very hard in the protection of human rights this year, providing help to the injured in more than 100 countries, and especially in Kosovo and East Timor, where it has helped reconstruct towns and villages and assist displaced persons.

All human rights are of equal importance to the individual, but the eradication of poverty, the need to ensure human dignity, and the protection of women and children are especially relevant. In addition to these points of vital importance, the Order of Malta cannot hide its concern over the lack of protection for religious minorities, who are suffering persecution in different parts of the world, especially in Asia and Africa, in contravention of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion — a right that must be duly respected.

We are pleased to recognize and proclaim that the world has come a long way since the adoption of the Universal Declaration. Its recognition is gradually becoming universal and includes the overthrow of totalitarian systems and racial discrimination. An important share of this substantial work is carried out by

the United Nations and the Commission on Human Rights. The Rome Conference held in 1998 to establish an international criminal court must be singled out as an important step. Now we need this new Tribunal to be converted into an efficient, impartial and fruitful organization.

Allow me to conclude this statement by reaffirming the commitment of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and underscoring the importance of international cooperation and the Order's support for the action of all those persons and entities devoted to the promotion of and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

**The Acting President:** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

**Mr. Gospodinov** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share some observations on humanitarian coordination, which we shall do with special reference to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The humanitarian and disaster response challenges that have faced the international community over the past year have been many and significant. At the same time, a number of severe crises and long-standing emergencies in Africa and in other parts of the world have continued, although they have received less attention. We select the example of Chernobyl because we believe it is a good example of coordination of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance and because it also illustrates several issues we should like to highlight.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has been involved in the provision of services to the populations affected by Chernobyl since 1990 and is currently planning to continue this until the year 2006. These services consist of medical screening, psychological support and other actions and focus in particular on children and those who were children at the time of the disaster. Our activities are closely coordinated with those of the United Nations system, ensuring that costs are kept at an absolute minimum and that there is no overlap between the agencies. The Chernobyl-related programmes of the International Federation, the United Nations and the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine have been pared down, streamlined, coordinated and made more efficient over the years. We are convinced that they deliver real benefits to the populations concerned.

The efforts that have gone into ensuring a coordinated approach, however, have not translated into a secure resource base. On the contrary, there is a real danger that our involvement will have to be discontinued. Evidently, we believe these activities must continue for several reasons. Chief among these is concern for the health and psychological welfare of tens of thousands of children. Another reason for continuing the work is the experience and knowledge we and other actors are gaining. Events in Japan and Korea in the last few months have shown that nuclear accidents can and will most probably happen again. We are not convinced that the international community is fully equipped yet to cope with the humanitarian consequences of such accidents. We need this experience and knowledge to ensure an adequate level of preparedness.

There are two issues for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies which emerge from this experience. In the first instance, it is necessary to examine the processes which determine the response to particular situations, with a view to ensuring that the interest of the victims is the primary factor — not media attention, political convenience or other interests. In the case of Chernobyl, it seems clear that the time elapsed since the initial events has allowed the humanitarian aspect of the situation to be de-emphasized.

Secondly, we need to develop funding tools that allocate resources in a more predictable manner than is the case today. This is partly a matter of expanding the donor base, but it is also a matter of ensuring that agencies and organizations can go about planning and managing their interventions with a level of confidence that they will be able to conclude their work in a systematic and professional way. That is the only way to ensure that the beneficiaries' interests in predictability and stability of the operations will be taken into account.

Dealing constructively with these issues, and with other broad coordination issues, requires the participants in the system to have their internal mechanisms in order. For its part, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has adopted a new strategy for the period 2000-2010, which aims to further harmonize and improve its national and international programmes in disaster preparedness and response. In particular, emphasis will be placed on ensuring that our system is responsive to local vulnerabilities and supports the development of local capacities that can be linked to other levels in case of need. We believe that a better coordinated Red Cross and Red Crescent system will

increase our capacity to coordinate with other partners, in this as in other fields.

On a different level, the recently concluded International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent also emphasized the need for effective response through improved preparedness, as well as strengthened mechanisms for cooperation and coordination among States, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other agencies. As a result, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as well as the International Federation, will review and strengthen their response capacities, particularly in relation to changing patterns of risk and vulnerability induced, for example, by climate change.

The International Federation looks forward to further strengthening its already good cooperation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with all United Nations agencies and with individual Governments to upgrade and develop the coordination mechanisms related to humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. The tragic events in Chernobyl, Turkey, Greece, and elsewhere do not leave us any other choice but to work more closely together, do better and help faster.

**The Acting President:** We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1, entitled "Emergency response to disasters".

I should like to announce that since its introduction, the following countries have joined as sponsors of the draft resolution: Belarus, Colombia, Eritrea, Gabon, Guinea, Iceland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel and Kuwait.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1?

*Draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1 was adopted* (resolution 54/30).

**The Acting President:** I should like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/54/L.22 and A/54/L.29 will be taken at a later date, and that further draft resolutions on this item will be submitted also at a later date.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 20.

**Agenda item 40**

**Oceans and the law of the sea**

**(a) Law of the sea**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/429 and Corr.1)**

**Draft resolution (A/54/L.31)**

**(b) Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982, relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/461)**

**Draft resolution (A/54/L.28)**

**(c) Results of the review by the Commission on Sustainable Development of the sectoral theme of "oceans and seas"**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/429 and Corr.l)**

**Draft resolution (A/54/L.32)**

**The Acting President:** I call on the representative of Finland to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.31 and to make a statement on behalf of the European Union.

**Mrs. Lehto** (Finland): I have the honour, as coordinator, to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.31 on agenda item 40, entitled "Oceans and the law of the sea". There are two other draft resolutions on this item: A/54/L.28, concerning the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and A/54/L.32, concerning the results of the review by the Commission on Sustainable Development of the sectoral theme of "oceans and seas". These draft resolutions will be introduced by the representatives of the United States and of New Zealand, respectively.

Since I am introducing draft resolution A/54/L.31 and also making a more general statement on behalf of

the European Union, the first part of my intervention will be brief. A more complete text of the introduction will be circulated.

In addition to the countries referred to in document A/54/L.31, the sponsors of the draft resolution include the Federated States of Micronesia and the Philippines.

Draft resolution A/54/L.31 is the result of a series of open-ended consultations, and I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the active participation in these consultations of a great number of delegations. The sustained interest in the item is reflected in the fact that the draft resolution contains nearly 20 entirely new paragraphs. Some of the more traditional preambular and operative paragraphs have also been considerably reworded and updated.

The focus of the draft resolution, as in previous cases, is to recall the strategic importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as the framework for action in the marine sphere, and to welcome the increase in the number of States parties to the Convention, while encouraging States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention and to the 1994 implementation Agreement. As previously, it also comments on recent developments with regard to the three institutions established by the Convention: the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Seabed Authority and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

At the same time, reflecting the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/429) on this item, the draft resolution comments on other developments and issues relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea. This year such issues include the dumping of nuclear waste and other toxic substances, the regional seas programme of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the increasing threat to shipping from piracy and armed robbery at sea, the importance of enhancing the safety of navigation and the continued work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization towards a convention on the protection of the underwater cultural heritage. The draft resolution also takes note of the major challenges, as well as of the areas of particular concern facing the international community with regard to the seas and oceans as they are formulated in the recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Developments during the past few years have confirmed the overall trend towards universal participation in and adherence to, the legal regime established by the Convention. Ensuring a coordinated approach to the implementation of the Convention has therefore become a priority. The draft resolution calls upon States to harmonize as a matter of priority their national legislation with the provisions of the Convention and to withdraw any declarations that are not in conformity with it.

The draft resolution also recognizes the increasing need, particularly of developing States, for advice and assistance in the implementation of the Convention and the Agreement. In this context, it is noted that developing countries, in particular small island developing States, may need assistance in the preparation and publication of charts required by the Convention, and the international community is urged to give them such assistance as appropriate.

The draft resolution highlights the importance of the annual comprehensive report of the Secretary-General, as well as the importance of the manifold activities of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Secretariat's Office of Legal Affairs. The Secretary-General is requested to continue to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to him in the Convention and in related General Assembly resolutions.

The final paragraphs of the draft resolution, concerning the annual review and evaluation by the General Assembly of the implementation of the Convention and other developments relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, make reference to the resolution to be adopted under sub-item 40 (c), which will set out the modalities for an improved debate on this item next year.

Before concluding the first part of my intervention, I would like once more to thank all the delegations that participated in the consultations on draft resolution A/54/L.31 for their important contributions and their remarkable spirit of cooperation. I would also like to thank the staff of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea for their highly competent assistance, which once again was invaluable to our work.

As Finland currently holds the presidency of the European Union, I will now continue with more general remarks, which I have the honour to deliver on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European Countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia —

and the associated countries of Cyprus and Malta, align themselves with this statement.

In recent years, particular attention has been paid to strengthening cooperation in ocean affairs. The new developments correspond to an acutely felt need for more coordination in this area. As pointed out in the Secretary-General's report now before us, the natural characteristics of the oceans make it impossible to limit the resources and various uses and physical processes of the oceans within specified politically and legally defined boundaries. This led to the fundamental principle enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that the problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole.

Following the 1998 International Year of the Ocean, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development emphasized in the report of its seventh session the importance of international cooperation in ensuring that the oceans and seas remain sustainable through integrated management. All States will be sure to benefit from the sustainable use of the oceans and seas within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and Agenda 21.

For the promotion of improved cooperation and coordination, the Commission recommended that the General Assembly establish an open-ended informal consultative process, or other processes upon which it may decide, to discuss relevant issues within the Assembly's mandate. The European Union supported decision 7/1 of the Commission, which was later endorsed by the Economic and Social Council.

We also fully support the establishment of an open-ended informal consultative process, which is to be decided upon under sub-item 40 (c). The process will operate through convening annual meetings. It will identify issues to be considered by the General Assembly, as well as areas where coordination and cooperation at the intergovernmental and inter-agency level should be enhanced. The annual meeting of the process should deliberate on the Secretary-General's report on oceans and the law of the sea, with due account given to any particular requests of the General Assembly, any relevant special reports of the Secretary-General and any relevant recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

To be meaningful, a process dealing with the vast area and the various uses of the oceans and seas by definition needs to be open-ended and transparent. It is of great importance to the European Union that the process ensures opportunities for civil society, representing various major interest groups in sustainable development and ocean affairs, to give inputs and thereby enrich our future deliberations. It is our understanding that the draft resolution we are about to adopt under sub-item 40 (c) provides for such participation.

It is also particularly important that international fisheries organizations, as well as environmental organizations, can be part of the process and share their expertise with other participants.

Obviously, any consideration of ocean uses shall be conducted within the legal framework of the Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is today as important as it was at the adoption of the Convention to recognize that all aspects of oceans and seas are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole. This is also in line with the objectives of sustainable development, as described in Agenda 21.

The Law of the Sea Convention is the cornerstone of the international efforts to solve problems related to the seas and oceans. Given its significant role for the management of the world's oceans, universal acceptance of the Convention — as well as of the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of Convention — is important. The European Union notes with satisfaction that the number of parties to the Convention has continued to increase. Presently, the Convention has 132 parties, among them nearly all of the member States of the European Union, as well as the European Community.

It should be noted, however, that a number of States that have ratified the Law of the Sea Convention have still not adhered to the Agreement. Once again, we call upon those States to ratify the Agreement as well. It is important that all States continue to work towards a universal, uniform and coherent body of law for the oceans and that they become parties to both the Convention and the Agreement.

Once again, we also note with concern that notwithstanding article 310 of the Convention, a number of States have made declarations that appear to exclude or modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the Convention. As the Convention clearly states in article 309 that reservations may not be made, such declarations cannot have any legal effect. Similarly unacceptable is

national legislation not in compliance with the Convention. The European Union is particularly concerned about unilateral measures that disturb the jurisdictional balance and claim authority in maritime space where no such authority exists in law. We want to underline that the Convention was adopted as a package and that respect for its integrity as a whole must be maintained and safeguarded.

As in previous years, the Secretary-General's report on sub-items (a) and (c) offers a comprehensive account of events and developments in the course of the reporting period. With particular appreciation, we note the detailed and interesting discussion in chapter VII of the report of matters concerning the development and management of marine resources and the protection and preservation of the marine environment.

As concerns institutional developments, the European Union appreciates the fact that the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is now fully functioning and has already delivered major decisions in four cases. The Tribunal has an important role in the dispute settlement mechanism established by the Law of the Sea Convention.

The International Seabed Authority has continued to establish its working procedures. It is to be hoped that the substantive work of the Authority will be conducted in an expeditious and cost-effective way. In this regard, we note with satisfaction the commitment of the members of the Authority to work towards the adoption during 2000 of the Regulations on Prospecting and Exploration for Polymetallic Nodules in the Area.

Similarly, we take note of the progress made in the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in adopting its Scientific and Technical Guidelines and an action plan on training, taking into account in particular the needs of developing States.

The European Union also considers it of crucial importance that all parties to the Convention pay their contributions to the Authority and to the Law of the Sea Tribunal in full and on time, and that States which are former provisional members of the Authority pay any outstanding contributions. The European Union emphasizes the need for the Tribunal and the Authority to ensure that their budgetary proposals are fully cost-effective, which in our view means that they should not be higher than those approved for the year 2000.

The European Union welcomes the work of the International Maritime Organization over the last year to tackle the serious problem of piracy and armed robbery against ships. This has helped to raise awareness and offer practical guidance on how to deal with incidents of piracy and armed robbery. However, the European Union remains concerned about the number of attacks against ships and the increased use of violence in such attacks. We believe that regional cooperation is essential if the action by coastal States is to be effective. Therefore the European Union urges all coastal States to cooperate and take all possible action to prevent attacks against shipping in areas under their jurisdiction and to investigate such attacks when they occur. In addition, the European Union calls on flag States to ensure that their shipping companies take appropriate precautions to protect their ships and crews from attack. The European Union continues to support the efforts and initiatives of the International Maritime Organization in this area and calls upon all Governments, particularly those in the areas most affected, to work with the IMO to eliminate these unlawful activities.

The European Union has continued its efforts to prevent illegal trafficking and transportation of migrants by sea. The member States of the European Union are actively participating in the elaboration of a protocol addressing smuggling of migrants by land, air and sea in the context of the preparation of a convention to combat transnational organized crime under the auspices of the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Smuggling of migrants frequently takes place by sea. The European Union considers it especially important that the smuggling of migrants be prevented. Next to criminalizing specific activities, effective prevention will require in particular increasing the cooperation between the appropriate authorities of States.

In the field of fisheries, the European Union recognizes the significance of the Agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks as an important contribution to ensuring the conservation and management of these stocks. The instruments of ratification of the European Community and its member States will be deposited simultaneously at the United Nations as soon as national procedures are finalized in each State. We hope to conclude this process in the near future. The European Union calls upon States that have not done so to ratify or accede to the Agreement.

The European Union attaches great importance to the integration of environmental, economic and social issues into sustainable fisheries management. We also stress the importance of control measures to enforce sustainable limits on the exploitation of specific fish stocks agreed in the framework of international organizations. Furthermore, the European Union urges the widespread incorporation into national fisheries sector working practices of guidance offered by the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. All States and fisheries management organizations need also to make special efforts to address the problem of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, which undermines all our efforts to achieve sustainable management of fisheries.

The European Union welcomes the work of UNEP to coordinate action by United Nations agencies and programmes in support of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. We emphasize the urgency of integrated action to prevent land-based pollution, which damages the vital resources of the seas and hampers their role in eradicating poverty.

The European Union also emphasizes the importance of the protection of the underwater cultural heritage, as reflected in draft resolution A/54/L.31.

Efforts to develop and codify international law have been particularly successful in the field of the law of the sea. Together with its implementing Agreements, the Convention on the Law of the Sea provides a constitution for the oceans that not only regulates the various uses of the seas but also thereby promotes the cause of peace and security.

The recent developments in the area of ensuring that the oceans and seas remain sustainable through integrated management lend additional relevance to the Convention regime. Likewise, the need for international coordination and cooperation highlighted by the Commission on Sustainable Development reflect well the goals and objectives of the Convention. At the same time, we would emphasize the importance of capacity-building in ways which are relevant to the needs of developing countries and which will facilitate their full participation in the integrated management of the ocean environment. Such developments are essential to the achievement of a global response to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

As in the past, the European Union recognizes the important functions of coastal ecosystems to human welfare. This is particularly relevant in the case of small island developing States. In this regard, we recall the recent special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and we are pleased that all participants in the session have reaffirmed their commitment to implement the Barbados Programme of Action.

The General Assembly is about to take another important step in the development and management of the ocean environment. The European Union gives its support to the draft resolutions before us.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the Secretary-General and the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs for the extensive and informative report on "Oceans and the law of the sea". It provides proof of the professional skills of the Secretariat in this field and bodes well for the new informal consultative process to promote consideration of ocean affairs at the United Nations.

**The Acting President:** I give the floor to the representative of the United States to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.28.

**Mr. Ortique** (United States of America): I am speaking on behalf of Rear Admiral J. S. Carmichael, who regrets that he is unable to be here today owing to weather conditions in Washington.

My delegation has the honour to introduce, on behalf of the other sponsors, the draft resolution entitled "Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks", contained in document A/54/L.28.

In the past several years major emphasis has been placed on sustainable fisheries at both the governmental and the intergovernmental levels. Most notably, this year the Committee on Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) made important progress by endorsing three international plans of action: the International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity, the International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks, and the International Plan of Action for Reducing

Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries. The United States is a strong supporter of the FAO international plans of action and participated actively in their development. The United States urges all countries to actively implement these important international plans of action by the timetables agreed to in the plans. We also wish to underscore the urgent need for the entry into force of the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and the FAO Agreement to Promote Compliance with Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas, as described in the report of the Secretary-General on agenda item 40 (b) (A/54/461). We urge all Governments if they have not already done so to become parties to these agreements as soon as possible.

The United States believes that one of the most effective ways nations can promote sustainable fisheries and address the problems of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing is to implement the provisions contained in the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, the Compliance Agreement, and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. The United States will support the work of the International Maritime Organization in addressing the problem of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, and urges other States to do likewise.

In introducing the text of the draft resolution entitled "Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks", contained in document A/54/L.28, I would like to draw the attention of delegations to a technical correction to footnote 5 of that draft resolution. That footnote should read as follows:

> "The Convention Area for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources as contained in document A/54/429, paras. 249-257 and 300-304".

My delegation also has the honour to be among the sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.31, entitled "Oceans and the law of the sea", as well as of the draft resolution on coordination and cooperation regarding sustainable development (A/54/L.32). Once again, we would like to extend our gratitude to all those delegations which offered valuable suggestions and worked in a spirit of cooperation to draft these texts.

The United States wants to express its long-standing support for the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. With paragraph 1 of draft resolution A/54/L.31 in mind, we are continuing to pursue ratification with the goal of becoming a party to the Law of the Sea Convention and to the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention. We support the call early in the draft resolution for States to harmonize as a matter of priority their national legislation with the provisions of the Law of the Sea Convention. Consistency would also be advanced, and it is in the interests of all that declarations and statements that are not in conformity with the Convention be withdrawn.

Concurrent with this idea of consistency is the noting in paragraph 30 of draft resolution A/54/L.31 of the continued work towards the development of a draft convention relating to underwater cultural heritage to assure full conformity with the relevant provisions of the Law of the Sea Convention. In this regard, the United States believes that there are still substantial issues on which there must be consensus before a draft convention can be considered for adoption, in particular the extent of coastal-State jurisdiction over underwater cultural heritage in the exclusive economic zone and on the continental shelf seaward of 24 nautical miles, and the treatment of vessels and aircraft entitled to sovereign immunity.

The United States shares the concerns expressed in paragraphs 20 through 23 regarding the need to cooperate to suppress acts of piracy and robbery at sea. We welcome the call in paragraph 23 for wider ratification and effective implementation of the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation and its Protocol. We believe that this will provide an international legal basis for cooperation in the apprehension and prosecution of such criminals.

In its paragraph 14, draft resolution A/54/L.31 refers to the work of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. It is important that the Commission proceed in a cautious manner in addressing the difficult issues of law, science and the relationship of the continental shelf and the deep sea ocean floor that it must inevitably face. It is important to keep in mind that only a minority of States have continental margins that extend beyond 200 miles. Regarding paragraph 19, we note that article 207 of the Law of the Sea Convention calls upon

States to take measures to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment emanating from land-based sources. In this regard, we are extremely pleased that parties to the Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region recently concluded and opened for signature a unique protocol on this very subject. We believe that this protocol will make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of the marine environment of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico.

Also this year, the Commission on Sustainable Development addressed oceans and seas as one of its themes. This Commission session resulted in a decision that highlights major challenges and areas of particular concern for oceans and seas, in our opinion. This decision should serve as an important guide for the work of countries and the General Assembly to conserve and manage our vital ocean resources.

The United States welcomes the inclusion of sub-item 40 (c) calling for an improvement in coordination and cooperation on matters relating to oceans and seas. This was an important outcome of the recent meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The full General Assembly review and debate, presaged in the clear language of Agenda 21, has now come to fruition. The debate will be informed, as the Secretary-General's report will be available for review in advance of the informal consultative process. The principles set forth in the Commission decision have been fully taken into account by the resolution. Our Government urges the involvement of the appropriate intergovernmental agencies, organizations and major groups. Only through such participation will we truly be able to identify how improvements and refinements can be made in this area. Governments will be undertaking this process secure in the knowledge — and I quote from Agenda 21, Chapter 17 — that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea:

> "sets forth rights and obligations of States and provides the international basis upon which to pursue the protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment and its resources".

We thank the group of South Pacific countries (SOPAC), the Rio Group, the Governments of New Zealand and Mexico and all of those who participated in this important negotiation. We look forward to the first meeting of this group in May. The positive and constructive spirit of these negotiations bodes well for our future.

In summary, Mr. President, the United States' objectives continue to be: first, promotion of widespread adherence to and implementation of the provisions of the Law of the Sea Convention and the 1994 Agreement; secondly, implementation of the Convention and the Agreement in a cost-effective manner with budgets held to the minimum; thirdly, the entry into force of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the compliance agreement; and, finally, provision for an annual overview of oceans issues in the General Assembly under a single agenda item. A large measure, but we are equal to the task.

**Ms. Hallum** (New Zealand): I have the honour, on behalf of the sponsors, to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.32, entitled "Results of the review by the Commission on Sustainable Development of the sectoral theme of 'oceans and seas': international coordination and cooperation". In addition to the 32 countries listed to in A/54/L.32 the sponsors include France, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Monaco, Panama, Philippines, Portugal, Slovenia and the United Kingdom.

The draft resolution before us is a new resolution that follows on from the Commission on Sustainable Development's review of the theme "oceans and seas" at its seventh session in April this year. The Commission devoted considerable time and attention to the need for improved international coordination and cooperation on oceans-related issues. The Commission was convinced that, building on existing arrangements, a more integrated approach was required to all legal, economic, social and environmental aspects of the oceans and seas, both at the intergovernmental and inter-agency level. In order to achieve this goal, the Commission made a number of concrete recommendations.

The draft resolution before us today carries forth and implements those recommendations and is the result of a lengthy process of collaborative work amongst a large number of delegations. The sponsors would like particularly to thank Mr. Navid Hanif of Pakistan and Mr. John Holmes of Canada for the able manner in which they chaired the open-ended consultations on the draft resolution, as well as all delegations for their constructive input and involvement. We also thank the Secretariat, both the Division for Oceans Affairs and the Law of the Sea and the Division for Sustainable Development, for their assistance.

The draft resolution recalls the importance of the oceans and seas for the well-being of present and future generations and emphasizes the interrelated nature of all aspects of oceans and seas and their need to be considered as a whole. The fact that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out is recognized, as also acknowledged in Chapter 17 of Agenda 21. The important role played by international organizations in ocean affairs and in promoting sustainable development is noted, as is the contribution of major groups identified in Agenda 21. The draft resolution welcomes the review of the theme of "oceans and seas" by the Commission on Sustainable Development and endorses its recommendations on the subject of international cooperation and coordination.

The crux of the draft resolution is set out operative paragraphs 2 and 3. Operative paragraph 2 establishes an open-ended informal consultative process to facilitate the General Assembly's annual review of developments in ocean affairs. This consultative process will meet to consider the Secretary-General's report on oceans and the law of the sea and will suggest particular issues to be considered by the Assembly, with an emphasis on identifying areas where coordination and cooperation at the intergovernmental and inter-agency levels should be enhanced.

Operative paragraph 3 sets out a number of matters relating to the organization of the meetings of the consultative process, namely: participation, duration and timing, matters to be taken in to account within the process, the chairmanship of the process, the format for the meetings, input from major groups and the link between the consultative process and the General Assembly's annual review. The meetings of the consultative process in the year 2000 will take place from 30 May to 2 June.

The importance of participation by developing countries, including least developed countries and small island developing States, is highlighted, and States and international organizations are encouraged to support efforts to that end. In order to facilitate the consultative process the Secretary-General is requested to make his annual comprehensive report available in advance of the consultative-process meeting and to include in the report suggestions of initiatives that could be undertaken to improve coordination and cooperation and to achieve better integration. The General Assembly will review the effectiveness and utility of the consultative process in three years' time.

Operative paragraph 8 carries forth the recommendations of the Commission regarding coordination at the inter-agency level. The Secretary-General is requested to undertake measures both with regard to coordination between relevant parts of the Secretariat and the United Nations system and with regard to the Administrative Committee on Coordination's Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas.

Operative paragraph 9 acknowledges the importance of coordination at the national level in order to promote an integrated approach.

Operative paragraph 10 requests the Secretary-General to bring the resolution to the attention of relevant intergovernmental organizations, specialized agencies and funds and programmes. The participation of these organizations and bodies both in the consultative process — as provided for in operative paragraph 3 (a) — and in the preparation of the Secretary-General's report is crucial if the consultative process is to be a success.

Operative paragraph 11 invites Member States to likewise encourage intergovernmental organizations to participate and to contribute to the Secretary-General's report.

It is hoped that the consultative process will considerably enhance this Assembly's ability to review developments in ocean affairs and the law of the sea. It should also, over time, lead to better coordination of the many-faceted activities being carried out by the international community on, in and around the oceans, thus promoting the integrated approach that is at the heart of the Convention.

I commend this draft resolution for adoption without a vote.

**Mr. Naidu** (Fiji): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following South Pacific countries: Australia, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country, Fiji.

For obvious reasons, the ocean is of immense importance to the South Pacific Group. We are a diverse group of countries separated by great distances. Despite this, we all share a common bond: the Pacific Ocean. The countries of our region are custodians of a great

expanse of the world's oceans, and our joint responsibility over this vast area unites us in a common purpose. The collective exclusive economic zones of the 16 South Pacific Forum countries amounts to more than 30 million square kilometres. The ocean is our traditional provider, and for many of us its bounty continues to be the principal resource for our continued economic survival.

We are concerned that, despite all the efforts that have been undertaken in recent decades by the international community to achieve the effective development and management of the oceans, the state of the oceans in many parts of the world remains precarious.

We consider that the annual review by the General Assembly of the developments in ocean affairs and the law of the sea is very important, and the South Pacific Group has always taken an active and constructive part in this review. The General Assembly is the only body within the United Nations family that can bring together all the complex and interrelated aspects of ocean governance, and we believe it should do so in a way that takes into account the views of all the various sectoral interests and actors. We also think the General Assembly should encourage the input and involvement of the wider oceans community. Given that the General Assembly is the only place in the international system where such a regular and comprehensive review takes place, it is crucial that it respond to the challenges posed by its responsibilities in this area.

The legal foundations for our work are very sound, and with the increasingly wide acceptance of the Convention on the Law of the Sea they are becoming more and more deeply rooted. However, this on its own is clearly not enough. As the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority and former Ambassador of my country, Mr. Satya Nandan said in this debate last year,

> "The establishment of the rule of law, albeit a major achievement, is not an end in itself, but a means towards a more orderly and rational use of the oceans and their resources." (*A/53/PV.69, p. 33*)

The legal framework provided by the Convention sets up a complex and interrelated network of international organizations and agencies, each with its own particular tasks, mandates and responsibilities. We are at the stage where these organizations and States are striving to implement the Convention and to carry out a diverse range of economic, scientific, environmental and technical activities on the basis of its provisions. In addition, there are a considerable number of separate conventions and treaties related to the use and protection of oceans and seas, with their organizations and agencies, which fit within the overall framework provided by the Convention.

The result is incredibly complicated, and it is difficult to get a coherent picture of all the developments and how they relate to each other. Suffice it to say that there are many different players with responsibilities relating to the oceans, including the International Maritime Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Hydrography Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Seabed Authority, the World Meteorological Organization, the World Health Organization, regional fisheries management organizations and regional environmental organizations.

The complex nature of the activities being carried out is reflected in the Secretary-General's annual comprehensive report. The report, which this year runs to some 100 pages, provides a broad and far-reaching summary of developments in the area of oceans and the law of the sea over the past year, and includes aspects such as peace and security issues, navigation, marine living resources, marine non-living resources, the protection of the environment and marine-science issues.

The General Assembly needs to review all these developments in an integrated and holistic manner. Individual sectors of the oceans community tend to become immersed in their particular activities and are often unaware of developments and activities in different sectors, even when these activities overlap. Without proper coordination and an integrated approach, there is a risk of ineffective and inappropriate policy-making and action based on sectoral considerations that may not accord with the overall aims and needs of the international community and the balance of interests in the Convention. We need each year to take an overview of all the work that is being carried out within this complex framework — to take stock of what has been achieved and to consider whether there are any problems, gaps or overlaps which could be addressed.

In this regard, the South Pacific Group of countries is very pleased to have been actively involved in efforts that have taken place over the past year to improve the

ability of the General Assembly to conduct its annual review by providing a forum in which this type of integrated and practically focused discussion can take place.

This issue was one of the main subjects of discussion in the Commission on Sustainable Development's review of the theme of "Oceans and seas", which took place earlier this year under the chairmanship of the New Zealand Minister for the Environment, Mr. Simon Upton. The Commission was able to make a number of action-oriented recommendations designed to improve international cooperation and coordination at both the intergovernmental and the inter-agency levels. In particular, the Commission recommended that an open-ended consultative process be established under the aegis of the General Assembly to facilitate the General Assembly's review.

Since the Commission's session in April and the adoption of its recommendations by the Economic and Social Council, the South Pacific Group has worked with other lead co-sponsors on the preparation of a draft resolution under sub-item (c) of agenda item 40, which puts into place the recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development on international cooperation and coordination of oceans-related issues. This draft resolution was elaborated in a series of open-ended informal consultations under the able co-chairmanship of Navid Hanif of Pakistan and John Holmes of Canada. We would like to thank both co-Chairmen for the very valuable role they played in coordinating the discussions, as well as all delegations for their participation and constructive involvement in this endeavour. We believe that the draft resolution before us today provides a very sound basis for the establishment of the oceans consultative process, which will hold its first session from 30 May to 2 June 2000.

The South Pacific Group looks forward to participating effectively in the meetings of the oceans consultative process. As the draft resolution notes, effective coordination at the national level is essential to an integrated approach at the international level. Accordingly, our preparations for the oceans consultative process will need to involve all the relevant agencies which are engaged in oceans issues at the domestic level. We will also be endeavouring to involve relevant regional organizations in the process, such as the Forum Fisheries Agency and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, as well as appropriate bodies from civil society. We note that the draft resolution provides for the Secretary-General's annual report on oceans and the law of the sea to be made available in advance of the session of the oceans consultative process and that it requests the Secretary-General to complement the report with suggestions on initiatives that could be undertaken to improve coordination and cooperation and to achieve better integration.

We hope that the co-chairpersons of next year's meetings of the oceans consultative process will be appointed at an early stage so as to enable them to carry out all the necessary preparatory work to ensure the meetings' success. We cannot afford to waste valuable meeting time discussing preparatory and organizational issues. With regard to the appointment of the co-chairpersons, the draft resolution notes the need to have representation from both developed and developing countries. We would further suggest that one of the co-chairpersons have experience on sustainable development and practical oceans management, while the other be an international lawyer with a good background in the law of the sea.

Before closing, I would like to thank the coordinators of the other two draft resolutions before us today, one under item 40 (a) on oceans and the law of the sea and the other under item 40 (b) on the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. The South Pacific Group takes a close interest in both these draft resolutions. We particularly note the reference in the draft on oceans and the law of the sea to the need for small island developing States to be given assistance in the preparation and publication of charts, as required by the Convention. We also welcome the decision of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf to convene an open session next [illegible] to familiarize interested States with the Commission's work and with what is involved in submitting a claim to the Commission.

With regard to the draft resolution on the Agreement on straddling stocks, we are pleased to be able to announce that additional members of our group have ratified the Agreement over the past year and that others are in the final stages of completing the necessary domestic steps to allow ratification. In addition, work has been under way over the last three years on the negotiation of a fisheries management regime for tuna in

the Western and Central Pacific. This management regime should give effect to the straddling stocks Agreement and incorporate the principles on which it is based, such as the precautionary principle, the principle of cooperation and the promotion of the long-term conservation and sustainable use of stocks.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.*